Mud snake

The **mud snake** (*Farancia abacura*) is a species of nonvenomous, semiaquatic, colubrid snake endemic to the southeastern United States.[2]

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Description

The mud snake usually grows to a total length (including tail) of 40 to 54 inches (1-1.4 m),[3] with the record total length being slightly over 80 inches (2 m).[4]

The upperside of the mud snake is glossy black. The underside is red and black, and the red extends up the sides to form bars of reddish-pink.

The heavy body is cylindrical in cross section, and the short tail has a terminal spine.

The head scalation is distinctive in that there is only one internasal scale, no preocular scale, and one anterior temporal scale. The dorsal scales are smooth, and are arranged in 19 rows at midbody. There are 168-208 ventral scales and 31-55 subcaudal scales. The anal plate is divided.[5]

Habitat

Mud snake

Western mud snake, *Farancia abacura reinwardtii*, in Illinois

Conservation status

Least Concern (IUCN 3.1)

Scientific classification

Kingdom:	Animalia
Phylum:	Chordata
Class:	Reptilia
Order:	Squamata
Suborder:	Serpentes
Family:	Colubridae
Genus:	*Farancia*
Species:	***F. abacura***

Binomial name

Farancia abacura
(Holbrook, 1836)

Synonyms[1]

- *Coluber abacurus*
  Holbrook, 1836
- *Homalopsis reinwardtii*
  Schlegel, 1837

F. abacura inhabits the edges of streams and cypress swamps, among dense vegetation or under ground debris. It is almost fully aquatic and rarely leaves the water, except to lay eggs, hibernate, or during drought to escape drying wetlands.[6][7]

Behavior

The mud snake is mostly aquatic and nocturnal. It preys mostly on giant aquatic salamanders in the genera *Siren* and *Amphiuma*, but it also eats other amphibians.[8] They are known to use their sharply pointed tails to prod prey items, leading to the nickname "stinging snake", although their tails contain no sting.

Reproduction

Breeding of *F. abacura* takes place in the spring, mostly in the months of April and May. Eight weeks after mating, the female lays 4 to 111[9] eggs in a nest dug out of moist soil, sometimes in alligator nests.[10] She will remain with her eggs until they hatch,[11] in the fall, usually September or October. Although unhatched eggs have not been found in the winter or spring, many juvenile mudsnakes are captured entering wetlands in the spring, most likely from clutches deposited and hatched in the preceding late summer or autumn. It is thought that mudsnake hatchlings either enter aquatic habitats in the autumn or delay entering them until the spring, but it is not known if they remain in a terrestrial nest or disperse into terrestrial habitats during this time.[12]

Geographic range

The mud snake is found in the southeastern United States, in the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.[2]

Cultural significance

The mud snake is one of a few animals which may be the origin of the hoop snake myth. J.D. Willson writes:

> Mud snakes are sometimes known as “hoop snakes” because of the myth that they will bite their own tail and roll after people.[2]

The hoop snake myth has also been attributed to the coachwhip snake.

Subspecies

- *Helicops abacurus*
  — Holbrook, 1840
- *Farancia abacurus*
  — Baird & Girard, 1853
- *Calopisma abacurum*
  — A.M.C. Duméril, Bibron & A.H.A. Duméril, 1854
- *Homolopsis crassa*
  Blyth, 1854
- *Hydrops abacurus*
  — Garman, 1883
- *Farancia abacura*
  — Boulenger, 1894

Eastern mud snake, Pasco County, Florida 2011

Venter

There are two recognized subspecies of *Farancia abacura*, including the nominotypical subspecies:

- *Farancia abacura abacura* (Holbrook, 1836) - eastern mud snake
- *Farancia abacura reinwardtii* (Schlegel, 1837) - western mud snake

Anerythristic eastern mud snake, Florida

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External links

- Species *Farancia abacura (http://reptile-database.reptarium.cz/species.php?genus=Farancia&species=abacura)* at The Reptile Database (http://www.reptile-database.org/)
- Illinois Natural History Survey: *Farancia abacura* (http://www.inhs.uiuc.edu/cbd/herpdist/species/fa_abacura.html)
- "Black Snakes": Identification and Ecology (http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/uw251) - University of Florida fact sheet

Further reading

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(*Farancia abacura*, pp. 609-610 + Plate 492).

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